

TOWN OF WINDHAM

JEAN de SMET
FIRST SELECTMAN



979 MAIN STREET
WILLIMANTIC, CT 06226-2200

February 13, 2009

RE: SB 3

The Town of Windham was one of the first communities in the state to build a waste incinerator. Thirty years ago, this was a new, promising technology. Our garbage would just disappear, and we would produce electricity and make money. What a great idea.

After one area was exposed to hydrochloric acid, we began to understand that even white smoke contains dioxins and mercury. Windham closed its incinerator because it was environmentally unsound and economically a drain. Soon after, CRRA asked if it could use our ash landfill, and waved millions of dollars as a lure. Windham residents said, "No, thank you, you do not have enough money to make us pollute our children's future."

During this time, CRRA tried to open an ash landfill on the Shetucket Plains in Windham. Residents fought the landfill, which could contaminate our river and aquifer. We won, apparently a temporary reprieve.

And here we are again. I'm now the First Selectman of Windham, in part because I fought CRRA's attempts to pollute Windham. We are not NIMBY's. We are here to testify that no one should have an incinerator as a neighbor, and no one should have to look at a 180' high ash landfill, and we should protect our pristine aquifers and rivers all over the country. The targeted area is on our Plan of Conservation and Development as high priority for preservation, because we value our quality of life.

One wonders why Windham and Eastern Connecticut are the prime targets for ash landfills in the state. Perhaps someone thinks we will sell our rivers, aquifers and views for a dollar. This is an environmental justice issue. If you look at the map of the proposed ash landfill, you'll see a straight line along one border. Theoretically, Windham won a temporary reprieve. But the Windham Board of Selectmen unanimously passed a resolution opposing an ash landfill at our gateway, over our aquifer and next to our river.

When Tom Ritter was Speaker of the House, this legislative body made a law that every town in Connecticut must incinerate its garbage. This policy was created solely to make incineration a viable enterprise, not because of a need for a new method of waste disposal. Later, this body declared that incinerator ash is not hazardous waste, a policy not based on science, but rather to support the incineration industry.

It's time for the State to recognize that those policies were created to enable a failing, polluting industry. Towns and cities, and the state, are being challenged to use these

economic times to re-examine policies and change wasteful practices. Incineration and ash landfills are an expensive and dirty way to dispose of garbage.

Let's use this opportunity to create a meaningful change in direction which will direct our state towards a sustainable future. Stop enabling incineration and ash landfills. Let us spend those hundreds of millions of dollars, which every town is mandated to spend on incineration, on an initiative to jump start recycling.

Some may worry that the proposed legislation could prevent the state from opening an ash landfill anywhere in the state. Embrace that possibility. Reduce incineration. Don't open new ash landfills. Force the waste industry to look into new technology, and at the same time, embrace the simple, common sense solutions to a non-problem. The recycling industry, too, has changed over the last 30 years. Windham didn't recycle at all when we started incineration. And we can recycle much more than we do. What still needs to be disposed of through incineration? All plastics, glass, metal, electronics and paper are recyclable. Food wastes are compostable. What's left? Very little.

There is an ash landfill in Putnam. There is potential capacity to last another 30 years. If we double our recycling rate, that landfill could last 60 years. CRRA can dispose of its ash there, or build a landfill in New York, where the garbage comes from. Or, they can close the incinerator, and other states will be inspired to recycle more as well.

Connecticut needs jobs. Let's put those great minds at UConn to work finding ways to reuse plastics, metals, glass and paper. We can create a sustainable industry, clean our air, and not leave a legacy of huge, polluted ash landfills for the archaeologists of 200 years from now.

These times call for brave new direction. We challenge you to lead us away from the failed technology of the past and into a cleaner, sustainable future.

Sincerely,

Jean de Smet
First Selectwoman

TOWN OF WINDHAM BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Resolution No. 2414

BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Selectmen THAT

WHEREAS: The land along the Shetucket River currently being studied for use as an ash landfill is among the highest priorities for preservation in the Town of Windham Plan of Conservation and Development, and

WHEREAS: This piece of land is identified as a high priority preservation area by the Windham Regional Council of Governments' Plan of Conservation and Development, and

WHEREAS: The Office of State Archaeology and the Connecticut Historical Commission view this land as potential resource, and

WHEREAS: Route 32 will be seriously impacted by the number of trucks needed to haul the ash to the site, and

WHEREAS: There is the potential for contamination of the aquifer and the river, and

WHEREAS: Membrane linings are not guaranteed to last forever, and

WHEREAS: No one knows what is in the ash because no one has control of what goes into the incinerator, and

WHEREAS: Incineration adds to global warming and air pollution, and

WHEREAS: The quality of life in this area will be negatively impacted.

THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED, by the Town of Windham Board of Selectman that we strongly recommend to the State of Connecticut to spend our limited resources encouraging recycling and finding uses for the ash from incineration that does not involve land filling, and to authorize the Town Attorney as directed by the Board of Selectmen to file administrative complaints, pleadings and petitions, to seek party or intervening status, and to procure information and data from other parties pursuant to law, to advance the purposes of the foregoing resolution.

Introduced By: Lorraine McDevitt Adopted: 1-20-09